



Blackfen School for Girls

Raising aspirations - releasing potential

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Remote Teaching and Learning update: (1)

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, may I pass on the very good wishes of our staff group to you and your family, at this difficult time. We hope that students and family members who are suffering from Covid symptoms make a full and swift recovery. The impact of the new variant of the virus was noticeable last term. Like you, staff in school were baffled by the spike in virus transmission in Bexley and although the return to school closure is disappointing, we hope it will be effective in bringing the pandemic under control.

The purpose of this letter is to update you on the school's development of remote learning and teaching; to set out our expectations of teachers, students and parents in the delivery of remote learning and to offer guidance on home learning for this term. The Department for Education expects schools to publish information for pupils, parents and carers about their remote education provision by 25 January 2021. Our Remote Learning Policy has been updated and is available in the 'Policies' section on the website. **You must read it.** Its scope complies with the Government's directives but its substance reflects the input of Blackfen parents since the 2020 period of school closure; the perspectives of our students and the professional input of our teachers.

Last term, teachers invested heavily in their development of remote learning: attending webinars, sharing expertise and devising new, imaginative methods, tools and resources to deliver subject content and skills remotely. More importantly, we recognised the potential of Microsoft Teams to deliver learning that blends teacher-led input and student-driven enquiry. With professional management, MS Teams offers students the responsibility and ambition to learn independently and enables teachers to deepen knowledge and understanding and drive attainment to higher levels. There is a real buzz of professional excitement about what can be achieved 'when we get back to normal' but your daughter/son will also be participating in blended learning, this term.

Teachers also discovered that simultaneously delivering a lesson to five students in a classroom and to 20 students remotely, via MS Teams on a laptop, is much easier said than done. Remote learning is not classroom learning and cannot ever replicate the countless, nuanced interactions between student and teacher that are the nucleus of effective teaching and learning. However, we are not giving up and you will see some of our progress in this term's remote learning offer.

So, what have we learnt about learning at home since March 2020? We have learnt that students are not robots; that parents are not teachers; that curling up in a corner of a bedroom is not the same as sitting in a specialist classroom and that everyone in the household needs a laptop (usually, at the same time). Microsoft Teams is not a universal babysitter and 'remote learning' does not equate to five hours of watching teachers on a screen. In other words, home learning is not the same as school learning and our Remote Learning Policy makes that plain. We don't ask our parents to deliver home



schooling. Instead, we ask our parents and carers working at home to be *parents and carers* because it is the job that you do best and it is the job that teachers cannot do. Parenting is a much tougher job than teaching and the final part of the Remote Learning Policy – the Appendices - acknowledges this point and provides a range of contacts to support you. It has been updated and is attached to this email. **You must read it.**

Students are accountable for the completion of remote learning, as they are for completing work that is taught and set in school. Parents and carers are expected to know how to use Microsoft Teams at a basic level, in order to access the different subject folders; to see assignments set and to note completion deadlines. A discussion with your child and / or accessing the following 'Student and parent guide to Microsoft Teams' might be useful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SemjM2fHV2Q>

This week, we asking every family to take three actions:

Action Step 1: To read the Remote Learning Policy and Appendix A, Appendix B and Appendix C.

Action Step 2: To ask your daughter or son to show you their version of MS Teams.

Action Step 3: To establish a robust and balanced household routine for working at home for the rest of this term, including school study, family time and genuine rest and relaxation.

I will stay in touch with you to offer practical support and explain a bit more about how parents and carers can manage remote learning at home. In future, letters will be tailored to specific year groups and their particular needs. But this week's Action Steps are for the parents and carers of every student in the school, from Year 7 to Year 13.

I first drafted this letter during the Christmas holiday and its focus was the return to school and importance of consistent attendance to academic attainment. Clearly, much of it has been deleted but the final paragraph remains intact. In April 2016, on the final day of his last visit to Britain as US president, Barack Obama told 500 youth leaders, A-Level and UK-US exchange students: "You've never had better tools to make a difference ... Reject pessimism, cynicism and know that progress is possible. Progress is not inevitable, it requires struggle, discipline and faith."

It's a good motto for uniting Blackfen parents, carers and teachers as we start the Spring term in 2021, at home, rather than in school. We know that we can work together to share the struggles; to instil discipline and to keep faith in each other to enable our students make the best progress possible. We know that our mutual encouragement and respect will get the job done.

Yours sincerely,



Miss F Minnis
Deputy Head Teacher

